

SMALL GRANT SUPPORTS FIRST ACADEMY OF FUTURE FRENCH TEACHERS (AFFT)

The idea for this event arose out of necessity and creative thinking about a problem—the current shortage of students enrolling in university programs to become French teachers. At the universities within our chapter, we have noted that this decline can have a negative impact on local French high school programs as such programs are simply eliminated (and not even always replaced with a different language), when there are no qualified candidates in French. Our purpose was to stimulate interest in becoming a future teacher of French, to supply demand, and to revitalize programs. The idea was that interest stimulated in young people can also increase wider enthusiasm when other students see peers with a decided interest in dedicating their professional lives to teaching French. Furthermore, since we had not heard of this being done elsewhere, we hoped that our event could serve as a pilot program for other such formation nationally.

We called the event the Academy of Future French Teachers Day: we gathered for lunch at a restaurant with a Francophone connection on a Saturday in late October for introductions and to get to know one another. During this time, the AATF officers greeted each of the participating students and their teachers, then distributed name tags and favors. Following lunch, we drove a short distance to Rockhurst University in Kansas City.

Participants were welcomed to the university, and a panel discussion then followed in two parts: first, teachers talked about why they chose this profession and mentioned a range of reasons from their passion for the subject to professional perks such as travel and Francophone connections around the world. During the second part, two former teaching *assistantes* talked about the opportunities available for teaching English in France for a year. Finally, other scholarships, conferences, travel, etc. were explained informally to give students an idea of the range of opportunities for professional development and support available to them. French teachers in the audience readily engaged in the discussion, and many points of view were represented, from that of middle school teachers to university supervisors of language teachers.

After the discussion, each French teacher presented her students with a beautiful certificate of attendance at the first AFFT.

Panelists for the first AFFT Day were:

Moderator: Katie Madigan, President, AATF Greater Kansas City Chapter, Rockhurst University

Part One: French and Methodology Teachers

Ann Sunderland, AATF Vice-President, Truman High School, Independence (MO)

Susan Hennessy, Missouri Western University, Dept. of French

Patience Sowa, Rockhurst University, Dept. of Education

Part Two: Former Assistants in France

Brandi Moeller, Blue Springs High School, Dept. of French (graduate of Truman State University, MO)

Samantha Wender, French Graduate Student, University of Kansas (graduate of Rockhurst University, MO)

Our specific schedule was as follows:

Gathering at restaurant (10:30 a.m.)

Lunch (11 a.m.)

Panel Part I (12:30 p.m.)

Panel Part II (1:30 p.m.)

Conclusion (2:30 p.m.)

The response to the Academy was strong, with twenty-five teachers and students in attendance. All of the teachers attending were AATF members, and thanks to an AATF Small Grant, we were able to buy lunch for all in attendance. In addition, we set up a “goodies” table so that students and their teachers could pick up posters and all kinds of brochures and other great material, mostly from AATF National Headquarters. If what was taken from the table is a sign of spurred interest, then that was one more indicator of success. Comments received afterwards were very positive, and we would encourage other AATF Chapters to consider organizing an Academy of Future French Teachers!

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